

RS# 02: Source 1 – Joint Hearing Majority Report, 1987 (Excerpt)

On May 5, 1987, joint Congressional hearings were held in the House and Senate to review the events of the Iran-Contra Affair. Democrats held the majority of seats in both chambers. The Majority Report criticized the Reagan Administration and blamed his chief aides. The Minority Report, spearheaded by Representative Richard Cheney (R-WY) and signed by eight House and Senate Republicans, called the hearings a witch hunt.

Examine this historical source and summarize the information it provides. Does the source support a view of Oliver North as a patriot, a pawn, or an outlaw?

Majority Report

The common ingredients of the Iran and Contra policies were secrecy, deception, and disdain for the law. A small group of senior officials believed that they alone knew what was right....They told neither the Secretary of State, the Congress nor the American people of their actions. When exposure was threatened, they destroyed official documents and lied to Cabinet officials, to the public, and to elected representatives in Congress....The Iran-Contra Affair was characterized by pervasive dishonesty and inordinate secrecy.

[Lt. Col. Oliver] North admitted that he and other officials lied repeatedly to Congress and to the American people about the Contra covert action and Iran arms sales, and that he altered and destroyed official documents. North's testimony demonstrates that he also lied to members of the Executive branch, including the Attorney General, and officials of the State Department, CIA and NSC. Secrecy became an obsession....

The NSC staff thereafter solicited other foreign Governments for military aid, facilitated the efforts of U.S. fundraisers to provide lethal assistance to the Contras, and ultimately developed and directed a private network that conducted, in North's words, a 'full service covert operation' in support of the Contras. This could not have been more contrary to the intent of the Boland legislation. . . .

Who was responsible for the Iran-Contra Affair?....At the operational level, the central figure in the Iran-Contra Affair was Lt. Col. North, who coordinated all of the activities and was involved in all aspects of the secret operations. North, however, did not act alone. North's conduct had the express approval of Admiral John Poindexter,... then... National Security Adviser. North also had...tacit support of Robert McFarlane...we believe that the late Director of Central Intelligence, William Casey, encouraged North, gave him direction, and promoted the concept of an extra-legal covert organization...

Source: Understanding the Iran-Contra Affair. "Majority Report." Brown University. Available from http://www.brown.edu/Research/Understanding_the_Iran_Contra_Affair/h-themajorityreport.php. Accessed 27 June 2011.